

working with me to ensure that this resolution does not have the unintended consequence of calling in question these critical national security programs. I believe the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, the Department of Energy's Material Protection Control and Accounting Program, and others have played and will continue to play a critical role in serving the national security interests of the United States.

Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Arizona.

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Indiana and I assure him that I support the Committee's report language which removes from consideration, under this resolution, any ongoing programs and projects which seek to reduce the threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, their materials, and know-how; as well as cooperative space programs between the United States and Russia and the programs of the National Endowment for Democracy which promote democracy and market economic principles in Russia.

#### A+ EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS

Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise today as a cosponsor of the Coverdell A+ education accounts, offered in legislation by my colleague the Senator from Georgia. This legislation would allow parents to contribute up to \$2,500 per child to an education savings account, in which it would accrue tax-exempt interest that could be used for K-12 education expenses.

Each year, Mr. President, we are bombarded with statistics showing that our children are losing ground academically.

Each year, colleges and universities spend millions on remedial education for children entering their halls without the basic skills necessary to succeed in their courses.

Fully 60 percent of our 17-year-olds are not reading at grade level. They are unprepared to take their place in a college classroom, or in the many skilled occupations that literally make our country work. It is painfully clear, in my view, that something must be done to improve the quality of our K-12 education.

We spend more money per child than nearly any other industrialized nation. But, tragically, half of American children cannot meet minimum standards in reading and math.

The problem with our schools is not how much money we are spending on them. It is how that money is being spent—and even more importantly who is deciding how that money will be spent.

Too many decisions regarding our children's education are being made by bureaucrats in Washington and too few by parents. Thus too much money is being spent on bureaucrats and Washington-knows-best regulations, and too

little on meeting the real educational needs of our children.

Mr. President, Michigan does not need Federal programs and Beltway bureaucrats to improve our education system; we need more power in the hands of our parents.

Teachers, principals, and school boards also are crucial to educating our children. But we must not forget that every child's most important, extensive, and fundamental education takes place in the home and must be guided by the principles and habits established there.

Every day parents educate children—helping with homework, looking over tests, and providing the love and support that foster successful intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. No Washington program can provide this nurturing. And this makes it our duty to increase parents' power and resources as they seek to steer their children to successful and responsible adulthood.

During the balanced budget debate, Congress focused a great deal of attention on loans and other assistance for higher education. But while the availability and quality of higher education should be an issue of tremendous concern for our Nation, it becomes a moot point if children do not receive the education they need in elementary and secondary school.

During consideration of the Taxpayer Relief Act last summer, Congress debated legislation allowing parents to set up an education savings account to help pay tuition and other expenses at public or private colleges.

Senator COVERDELL offered an amendment to that provision, allowing the funds to also be used for K-12 education expenses. This amendment passed the Senate but, regrettably, was taken out during conference due to a threatened veto by the President.

Thankfully, the Senator from Georgia has reintroduced his amendment as a free-standing bill. In doing so, he has forced Congress to address the critical question of what we can do to support parents as they struggle to provide the best education possible for their children.

Senator COVERDELL's legislation is an important step in the right direction because it provides parents greater opportunity to save and invest in not only their child's higher education, but in their child's elementary and secondary education as well.

Specifically, the Coverdell A+ accounts bill expands the use of education savings accounts to include expenses related to elementary and secondary education at public, private, or religious schools and homeschools.

Parents may withdraw from the account to pay for tuition, fees, tutoring, special needs services, books, supplies, computer equipment and software, transportation, and supplementary expenses.

This legislation provides parents with a wide variety of opportunities to supplement their child's education.

Some parents may choose a private or specialized education setting for their child.

For children attending public school, parents can use the money for tutoring or transportation costs. For parents of a child with special needs, the money could be used for tutoring or other personalized services.

Put simply, the Coverdell A+ accounts bill provides parents with more options to meet the educational needs of their children at an early age. And this improved education will produce better opportunities for their children throughout their lives.

Mr. President, the education savings account proposal for higher education passed Congress overwhelmingly, and was supported by the President. It is simply irrational to oppose the same concept for elementary and secondary education.

For all the reasons Congress supported investing in higher education, Congress must support investing in elementary and secondary education. Both proposals are based on a sound principle, that parents should plan for the long-term educational needs of their children. The Coverdell proposal allows parents to do that from the moment their child enters elementary school until that child graduates from college.

In my view, Mr. President, there is no reason to oppose A+ accounts on the grounds that they would provide Federal support to religious schools.

Right now, today, Federal funds in the form of student loan guarantees and other assistance are helping thousands of college students attend religious colleges. I have heard no serious objections to this practice, and I am glad for that.

There is no reason to discriminate against students choosing to attend Catholic University, Notre Dame, Calvin College, or any of the many other fine religious colleges in America.

By the same token, however, there is no sound reason for objecting to students and their parents who choose to attend primary and secondary schools with religious affiliations.

Likewise, Mr. President, I see no basis for the charge that A+ accounts will starve our public schools of needed funds. No provision in this legislation will cost public schools so much as one thin dime.

Rather, A+ accounts will bring significant benefits to our public schools. We should keep in mind, for example, that fully 70 percent of the children whose parents will receive benefits under this legislation attend public school. The extra help in the form of tutors, computers and other aids that the children will receive thanks to A+ accounts will make them better students and enhance the learning experience for all children in those schools.

#### HONORING THE KIRKS ON THEIR 50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Mr. ASHCROFT. Mr. President, families are the cornerstone of America.